

BOOK REVIEW

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***Electronic Literacies: Language, Cultures, and
Power in Online Education, by Mark Warschauer***

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Electronic Literacies: Language, Cultures, and Power in Online Education by Mark Warschauer (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 1999, 220 pp., \$24.50)

Because my interests include online classrooms and the students in them, the title of this book intrigued me. My definition of literacy has expanded over the past several years to embrace the idea that literacy encompasses more than reading and writing and includes a functionality component that needs to be present for an individual to be truly literate in any environment.

Warschauer examines how "the nature of reading and writing" (p. vii) is changing by presenting an in-depth look at four language and writing classes taught on the island of Oahu, Hawaii. The classes were comprised of culturally and linguistically diverse learners.

The book has six chapters, an epilogue, and an appendix. Chapter One is an introduction to the concept of literacy. Chapters Two through Five report on each of the four classes used in Warschauer's study. Chapter six presents his conclusions about the "multiliteracies" students experience. The epilogue contains a description of the four teachers' classroom activities after the completion of the study. The appendix presents Warschauer's approach to this study.

Warschauer presents an overview of the "terrain of literacy" in Chapter One. In the first half of the chapter, he discusses the notions of reading and writing during the pre-Gutenberg era, after the introduction of the printing press, during the industrial revolution and, most recently, during the 20th century. The second half of the chapter focuses on the online era and the information revolution. Three contro-

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versies associated with the development of electronic literacies are introduced and briefly discussed. These controversies include the nature of electronic literacies, electronic literacies and school reform, and electronic literacies and equality/inequality of information. The chapter concludes with a question about the effect of electronic literacies on the stratification of online users.

Chapters Two through Five present a case study for each of the four classes studied—Mary's advanced ESL composition class; Luz's writing course for foreign graduate students; Kapili's Hawaiian language class; and Joan's specifically designed English class, which included intensive networked written discussion and a service learning component. Warschauer investigated the electronic literacy experiences of students from a variety of cultures. The four language and writing classes took place at different institutions on Oahu, which had student populations comprised of students from the Hawaiian Islands and international students as well.

Chapter Two, "Computers, Composition, and Christianity," describes Mary's classroom. Mary taught an English as a second language (ESL) course at Miller College, a small Christian school. The majority of her students were from Pacific Island nations, with a few from other countries in Latin American and Asia. Students in Mary's class had been admitted to the college but, because of low test scores, were required to take some ESL classes. This class focused on genres of U. S. academic writing.

The chapter is divided into six sections: discipline and order in the classroom, uses of technology, topics and content, resistance and change, the social context of learning, and socialization and situationally constrained choice. I have included these headings because Warschauer stated that this study served as his pilot study, which helped him to clarify the questions and situations he wanted to investigate. He stated,

[working with Mary] strengthened my interest in working with teachers who

seemed to have a critical perspective on language, writing, and education. I wanted to look at a classroom in which a teacher was consciously trying to use online tools to strengthen student involvement and empowerment, in an institutional environment where such a perspective could be supported. (p. 43)

Chapter Three, "Networking into Academic Discourse," describes Luz's classroom at the English Language Institute at the University of Hawaii. Luz taught a non-credit writing course for foreign graduate students, both master's and doctoral students. Her teaching philosophy focused on helping students "integrate into academic life in their own disciplines" (p. 44). Luz used technology purposively to promote apprenticeship learning between first the teacher and student, student-student, and student-discourse community. Warschauer presented examples of teacher-student apprenticeship, student-student or collaborative apprenticeship, and peripheral participation between students and relevant communities of practice within their fields. Students in this class learned about technology and put the tools to immediate use by writing about their own experiences, thoughts, and questions.

Chapter Four, "Computer-Assisted Language Revitalization", described Kapili's classroom, which differed from the previous two classes because it was a class in Hawaiian, not English, being taught at the University of Hawaii. The students in this class were mostly native Hawaiians, versus the international mix of students in the previously discussed two classes. Warschauer played a participant-observer-student role in this class. He had been a researcher in Mary's class and a co-teacher and researcher in Luz's class.

Warschauer discussed the reasons for poor Hawaiian performance in the American educational system. Hawaiians are a very social people and had used the metaphor of the net to describe their social relationships even before the introduction of the World Wide Web. Previous research has shown that Hawaiians learn best when

... education emphasizes encouragement and opportunities to develop the whole person through dynamic and experiential learning experiences, a strong connection to one's roots, nurturing and expression of interests and talents, relationships that foster a true sense of belonging and inclusion, and the striving for perfection. (p. 112)

Chapter Five, "Cyber Service Learning," describes Joan's classroom, which included not only a writing component, but a service learning component as well. Joan teaches at Bay Community College, which has a diverse student population made up of locally-born students, students from the U.S. mainland, and students from throughout Asia and the Pacific. The purpose of Joan's class was to provide an authentic communicative writing experience. Warschauer played the role of researcher and in-class helper, as Joan was an experienced teacher of computer-based writing. In the first half of the semester, students had Daedalus discussions and wrote two essays. During the second half of the semester, the focus shifted from a traditional format in which students were writing for the teacher, to one in which students were writing according to the needs and demands of the service organization with which they were working. Warschauer ends this chapter with a discussion of four themes that surround Joan's class—real world purpose, different genres-different media, decentered classrooms, and connection to the community.

In Chapter Six, "Conclusion: Striving Towards Multiliteracies," Warschauer revisits the three issues he introduced at the beginning of his book—the nature of electronic literacies, educational practices and reform, and the relationship of electronic literacies to (in)equality. First, he reviewed the two technologies, computer-mediated communication and hypertext, used in the classes he studied. The four classes are analyzed concerning how these technologies were used in each class and how they affected the students. Secondly, educational practices and reform measures were discussed in relation to the four classrooms as well as what would be needed if further reform was

desired. Warschauer introduced the New London Group's pedagogical model, which addresses the issue of new media literacies. The New London Group's "pedagogy of multiliteracies" (New London Group, 1996, as cited on p. 165) has four features—situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing, and transformed practice. Warschauer stated that this model seemed "consistent with the best of what occurred in the four classes in this study" (p. 166).

Warschauer stated that the most important issue addressed in his book was the "impact of the Internet on (in)equality" (p. 168). He looked at the issue from a critical perspective and in three areas: technological access, language and discourse access, and cultural appropriation. Warschauer shared his vision of literacy for the future:

Becoming fully literate in today's society, at least in the industrialized world, means gaining competent control of representational forms of a variety of media and learning how those forms best combine in a variety of genres and discourses" (p. 177).

His parting thought is one for all educators. He stated that if we as educators can join with our students to help create opportunities in today's technology-driven society, which will allow them to find their voices, gain knowledge of the languages and discourses of power, and reflect critically on whether, when, and how they should use their voices and knowledge, then "together we can strive of a digital era that is more free, more just, and more equal than the print era we may one day leave behind" (p. 178).

The final two sections of the book are an epilogue and an appendix. The epilogue contains follow-up information about each of the four teachers involved in Warschauer's study. This is a nice addition to the book, as chapters two through five focused mainly on the students and their experiences. In the appendix, Warschauer introduces himself, shares his beliefs about literacy, culture, and language

acquisition, and explains his research methodology.

In summary, the book provides an insightful look into four culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms that were using technology to expand students' language and writing skills. The book was not difficult to read and provided relevant examples to support the discussion presented about the four classes War-

schauer studied. My only complaint is that I got too involved in several of the examples presented and had to re-read a portion of the text preceding the examples to get back on track again. I found that this book heightened my awareness of the problems that students experience on multiple levels when they encounter an innovative learning environment.